/12 cont./

682 426 If the blood-price was not paid within a certain period, then at the end of the year, in place of a debt of four spans, five were owed, in place of five, six, and six became seven, so that an already considerable debt increased still more and weighed like a heavy burden on the shoulders of the debtor. But the Abkhaz had one excellent custom -- that of coming to the aid of an insolvent debtor. All the latter had to do was to announce that he "owed for blood," and everybody contributed his mite to pay off the debt.

796 682 608 The following ceremony was considered the best way to a complete reconciliation of the parties involved in a blood-feud. A relative of the killer gave a banquet and, through intermediaries, invited the claimant of blood himself or his son. It was sufficient to persuade the claimant of blood to touch his lips to the breast of the wife or mother of the debtor, and, as a result of this action alone, everlasting and indissoluble peace would be restored between them. If, on the other hand, the blood-avenger would not be appeased and would not come to the feast, then those acting for the other side endeavored to abduct the son or some other close relative of the claimant or in some other way get such a person into their house. If they succeeded, then peace was restored whether the avenger liked it or not, for to kill the foster father was considered a violation and desecration of the "breast" and beneath the dignity of a brave man. Love of homeland is developed to the highest degree in the Abkhaz. Some peoples say, ubi bene, ibi patria, but the Abkhaz, on the other hand, prays: "There is no better place in the world than Abkhazia. God, save Abkhazia." In both grief and happiness alike, the Abkhaz repeats this prayer.

186

574 As is the case with all ancient peoples, hospitality is piously honored and maintained in Abkhazia. The Abkhaz is convinced that every guest is accompanied by seven "baraka" (blessing, /13/ bliss, abundance), one of which remains with the host, and God gives back to the guest this seventh baraka. Even the poorest Abkhaz does his utmost to treat his guest as well as possible; when an Abkhaz sees a traveler going along the village

/22 cont./

565 they are prepared to sacrifice their lives for him if necessary.
608
[579] When a ward dies, the grief and sorrow of the foster parents
[064] are unbounded; for his funeral they furnish a shroud and money;
[065] they also bring one or two bulls, sheep, etc. for the funeral repast for the deceased. When their ward marries, they give
[585] him all kinds of assistance through their personal labor. They also present him with fattened animals and bring presents to his bride as well.

608 Among the Abkhaz another type of wardship also exists,
565 namely, that of an adult man being invited to assume the role
796 of ward. The Abkhaz peasant invites such a man with the words, "I wish to take you into my house and honor you according to my means." On the appointed day, the person invited goes to the house of his future foster father and takes along a few additional people. During the supper the host and his relatives kneel down in front of their ward-to-be and give him a glass of wine; they then stand and one of them addresses to him the following speech: "From this day on we regard you as having been nursed in our family; we are of the same spirit as you and will begrudge you nothing; we hope that you, too, will begrudge us nothing; you will be held in higher esteem than the other wards." After this they present him with a few rubles and give something to his companions (khadzh /see foreign text/). While handing over the presents, they say, "Vadcha enup" (a present for you). This ceremony ends in the following way: on a carpet, spread on the floor, a chest is placed, on which the wife of the host of the house, i.e., the future foster mother, seats herself; the other women surround her. Then the ward-to-be enters through the open door, stands in front of the hostess seated on the chest, greets her, /23/ and thrice touches with his lips the nipple of her breast, or, as the Abkhaz say, "bites her nipples three times"; after each time he repeats, "from this day on you are my own mother." And indeed, from
608 this time on exactly the same mutual relations obtain between
565 them as in the first case where another's child is fully reared. It need hardly be said that, besides the princes and nobles, the

/35 cont./

upon the summit of the mountain Tabakona. They are divided into groups according to their degree of power: the younger ones usually travel upon mice, frogs, cats, etc., the older ones on foxes, wolves, etc. On Assumption Eve they are all obliged to gather upon the Tabakona for the annual report of their deeds to their sovereign, Roskipi, and to produce material proof of their industrious service -- a heart taken from a man or animal, a liver, eyes, nails, hair, etc. To avoid attack from witches, the Abkhaz take the following measures: during the fast of the Assumption they erect crosses and stick candles in their hair, and on the eve of the Assumption they shoot off rifles, sing, and spend the whole night in vigil. The Abkhaz believes that a witch can simultaneously be at home, among people, and on top of the mountain Tabakona. The Abkhaz explain such a splitting-up of a person by saying that it is not the witch herself that wanders about, but her accessory soul (aphschchda = superfluous soul).

2.

The True God -- Paganism -- The Principal and Secondary Gods of the Abkhaz -- Causes of Polytheism -- "Creators" and "Forgers" -- Fate or Predestination.

To assist the supreme being, endowed with all the qualities with which, according to our understanding, God is endowed, says Mr. A., Abkhaz mythology added a number of other deities, assigning to each his particular designation. These assisting deities, according to their understanding, were created by the Almighty before man and the universe came into being, and people at prayer appeal through them to God himself. God himself never descends to earth, but if he needs to punish someone or to grant someone his grace, he sends out one of his assistants. In the prayers which are said and sung at sacrifices and other

/44 cont./

7.

782
585
[776] The Prayer Ceremony in Honor of Azhahara

The Abkhaz call the protector or genius of the house and hearth by the name Azhahara in whose honor is performed the ceremony for a young married couple in the stage of their marriage before they have appeared together before their elders and the young woman is for the first time led into her husband's main house, or when the bride is invited into her father's house. One of the oldest members of the family sticks pieces of the heart and liver of a sacrificial animal on a spit and begs Azhahara to protect the young couple at home and out of doors.

8.

Alishkantra

782
231
[776] Alishkantra is the "mistress" of dogs. In the opinion of the Abkhaz, the owner of good dogs will also be fortunate in the multiplication of his cattle; good fortune in dogs is associated with good fortune in all domestic animals. Therefore before praying to other god-protectors of domestic and wild animals, the Abkhaz prays to Alishkantra to grant him luck with good dogs and the opportunity to raise and breed them.

9.

/45/ A Prayer in Honor of Zhabran

[776] Zhabran is the protector of animals. Every Abkhaz owning cattle performs the prayer-ceremony in his honor on "Cheese Saturday." For this they prepare suluguni (a big cheese) called "sacred cheese"; bread dough is placed on the hearth, in which a man puts a core of suluguni, whereupon he prays, "Prefer me to all those pronouncing your name;
[796]
[262]

/45 cont./

782 make my cattle multiply; make them increase to such an
231 extent that in the future I may pray to you and offer you a cheese as big as this loaf of bread and my courtyard will have no room for all my cattle. Preserve my cattle from all trouble and misfortunes both at home and outside; grant that my cattle will lose only old hair and dung; grant that my herd will be so large that an animal walking in the rear will be unable to overtake one running in the front; may the calves play like young bears and shine like young stallions. This I ask of you." Then the person praying puts three walnut branches in the bread dough and, striking against the ceiling, exclaims, "Voots! chiphsh!" (a call to summon cattle). The same ceremony is performed on the Thursday of "Cheese-
[796] week" in honor of the protector of goats; it is called Dzhabran.

10.

A Prayer in Honor of Aithar

[796] Aithar is the protector of domestic cattle and the
[796] farm economy. The prayers to him are held on a Saturday, except during Lent, because offerings to him must consist of milk products, and among the rich the offering is a milk-fed calf. The customary dish at this time is a thin gruel made with the milk of a cow that has recently calved. The shepherds stand around a kettle or pot filled with gruel; the oldest of them, holding a wax candle, pronounces a prayer: "Aithar, grant me superiority above all those who pronounce your name." He then begs Aithar to increase his herds and to protect them from beasts of prey. Upon concluding /46/ the prayer, the shepherd throws three spoonfuls of gruel into a brazier with coals standing nearby, and the participants eat the rest. If the inhabitants of the whole village or a part of it perform the ceremony in honor of Aithar, then a calf is sacrificed, which is slaughtered by the most respected old man, who first pronounces a prayer. After the meat of the calf has been cooked or roasted, the same old man

/46 cont./

782 231 pronounces a prayer the second time, cutting off pieces from different parts of the animal and offering them to Aithar by throwing them on the red-hot coals.

11.

Azhvephshaa (Abn-intsvakhu)

782 224 776 796 Azhvephshaa is the god of the forests and wild animals. Hunters sacrifice to him before setting out on a hunt, usually the middle or at the end of December. For the sacrifice, they jointly buy a ram or a goat. When it is roasted, the oldest huntsman prays to Azhvephshaa to send success for their undertaking; at the conclusion of the prayers, he throws small pieces of roasted meat and a piece of incense on the coals. Each of the remaining hunters repeats the prayer in turn, adding his own wishes and indicating the particular animal he would like to kill, while throwing pieces of incense on the coals.

12.

Dzhadzha and Anaphanga

782 24 776 796 Dzhadzha is the patroness of the crops. Prayers to her are offered twice a year: in March, at the beginning of spring, and in November, after the maize has been stored. Praying to Dzhadzha is not accompanied by any special solemnity; it is performed quietly by each individual family. Rich landowners sometimes invite their former dependents to the prayer, particularly those who have taken part in the sowing and reaping of their crops. On the day set aside for prayer, dishes made exclusively of grain and fruits grown by the master of the house are prepared. After the food has been placed on the table, the oldest member of the family /47/ addresses a prayer to Dzhadzha, thanking him for the good harvest or begging him to send everything in abundance. For the spring prayer to Dzhadzha, all the dishes prepared are lenten.

/47 cont./

782 and light, well-being and success in everything; grant
821 beauty, charm, and elegance to our maidens so that, like you, they may shine, glitter, and warm people." In the prayer to the moon, they express the wish that the children should become like it in brilliance.

/48/ 15.

Prayer to Khphath and Khvnash

782 This prayer is offered on the Saturday of the week of
[796] Thomas, with cheese, bread, wine, candles, etc. brought as offerings. The aim is to solicit health and prosperity for the family. On one of the following Saturdays a similar prayer is addressed to Khvnash. Khphath and Mdzhath are
[551] men's names in Abkhazia.

16.

"Ananaha"

782 Anan means "mother." The oldest woman of the
796 household places some money on a loaf of bread (Anan l phara = money of Anan) and goes into the kitchen-garden where she places three cucumber-leaves on the loaf of bread and the same number on her own head. She then fastens a lighted candle to a cucumber stalk and, holding incense in her hands, prays, "Mothers and creators, do not let me have grief from my sons: do not cast me into sorrow because of them, but let me see them prosper." A similar prayer is said to Ashatsanha, the god-creator or god-father. A cow and money are offered in sacrifice to him. During Lent, the village maidens also used to pray to the "Mother of the Waters" that she might grant them long and thick hair.

17.

Prayer for the Ear

753 The Abkhaz says, "ahsa r lmha i klou," which means

/49 cont./

[755] [782] ram or a lamb, together with loaves of bread, etc. All this is taken to the place selected, and the patient himself is led there. No women are present, for they are not [562] allowed to approach this sacred place. A venerable man, holding a candle, declares, "Great god, as is proper and as the fortune-teller has prescribed, the worshiper today stands before you; he has brought sacrificial animals and loaves of bread ... . Have mercy upon him, be merciful to him, if he has sinned before you, forgive him. I beg you to let him go from this day forward, to leave him and free him like a loosened knot." While saying these words, the venerable man moves the candle around the patient, lights it, and places it nearby. He then /50/ takes another candle [776] and prays to Michael-Gabriel. Upon the completion of this ceremony, the sick person returns home alone, while the others sit down to a meal.

One such ceremony, however, is not considered sufficient for the send-off of so eminent a guest as a god. The [796] Abkhaz is therefore obliged to repeat the ceremony annually. One day a week is set aside as a holiday in honor of that same supreme being; this day is considered such a sacred one that the house even remains unswept, etc.

19.

Aphi

[776] [821] Aphi (2) is the god and master of the thunder, lightning,

[113] 2. See Sborn. sveden. o kavk. gortsakh, No. V, Tiflis, 1871, pp. 15-16, article "Religioznyye verovaniye abkhaztsev /Religious beliefs of the Abkhaz/," by A. -- where, by the way, this deity is called Afy.

[782] and all atmospheric phenomena in general. The most solemn prayers in Abkhazia are offered in honor of this god.

/50 cont./

782 On the day set for the prayer, usually at the time when
733 the herds are driven into the mountains for the summer and
[796] when they return in autumn, the shepherds of the village break up into several groups, each group choosing a pretty spot in the forest near a brook or river. Some rams, according to the number of participants, are slaughtered, and the oldest shepherd of those departing for the mountains addresses Aphi, begging him to preserve them as well as their herd from the thunder-
[562] bolts. Women and children do not dare to be present at the prayers to Aphi, and women may not even pronounce his name. When talking of Aphi, the Abkhaz usually say "khakhikal" ("the one above" or "the supreme one.")

782 During a prolonged drought, a prayer with sacrifices is
731 offered in honor of Aphi. The best bull is chosen from the
789 herd and a day is set for the sacrifice. The villagers bring gomi, bread, fresh cheese, and a jug of wine. The most venerable old man holds a rope fastened to the horns of the bull; removing his cap, he pronounces the following prayer, "Oh Aphi, master of thunder, lightning, and rain! have pity on your people. Our harvests have dried up, the grass is withered, our livestock perishes from want of feed, and therefore /51/ death from hunger threatens us. Command the rain-clouds to gather, command the thunder to peal, the lightning to flash, and send us rain to save the perishing people." The participants say "Amen," and the sacrificial animal is killed and its meat cooked. After all the dishes, made from ingredients brought with him, have been pre-
[533] pared and laid out on mats, the old man who said the prayer repeats it, and then, with the singing of a hymn in praise of Aphi, the feast begins. This hymn is called Anchva rysshva
[821] and is sung in honor of Aphi, not only at feasts, but also during thunderstorms. In the first instance, it is sung with thankfulness for the gifts that are enjoyed, in the second,
782 to move Aphi to send good weather. During the feasts, one
731 of the elders usually addresses a speech to those present, re-
574 minding them that all they are then enjoying comes with the blessing of Aphi and suggesting that they thank him. Then

/52 cont./

2. Ibid., p. 162.

175 764 of Syracuse (who lived about the middle of the fourth century B.C.) said /53/ that "it is not accepted among the Colchians either to bury or to burn the corpses of men. They put these corpses in fresh animal-hides and hang them on trees. They commit to the earth the corpses of women, however, ... They venerate heaven and earth above all" (1).

1. Ibid., p. 208.

20.

Shasha

326 796 Under the name of Shasha the Abkhaz understand the inventor of the craft of the smith. They say of him, "Shasha khe ah-dou," which means, "Shasha, the great lord of trades." Shasha or Shash was the first blacksmith. He picked up the red-hot iron, not with tongs, but with his hands, and he forged it, not on an anvil, but on his knees. He is the inventor not only of the craft of the smith, but the inventor-patron of 363 other crafts as well. The smithy with all its appurtenances is the image of Shasha (2).

2. Iveriia, 1888, No. 186.

[787 796] [919] Prayers are offered up to him on New Year's Eve, and the most complete of the ceremonies to him is held by the blacksmiths and the locksmiths.

787 326 On New Year's Eve the master of the house kills either a calf or a ram, and his wife kills a rooster for each member of the family and prepares a pie of wheat-flour and fresh cheese. The livers and hearts of all the slaughtered animals are roasted separately; for this, instead of a spit, a stick from a young nut-tree is used. When the food is ready

/56 cont./

579 all this is hung on trees near the place where Eyrig-aatsnykh
782 is believed to have his permanent abode.

22.

Anybs-nykha-dudryuphsh

776 Anybs-nykha-dudryuphsh is worshiped as the mightiest
[778] of the gods. Mt. Dudryuphsh is regarded as his abode. Those who dare to climb this mountain are immediately punished with blindness; therefore prayers and sacrifices to this deity are offered at the foot of the mountain. As a deity, Anybs-nykha has no exclusive, professional field of authority, but he is worshiped as higher and mightier than all the other gods.
[782] The arrangement of prayers and sacrifices to him is the same as to Sha-sha, with the difference that when an oath is taken in his name, the formula is "May Anybs-nykha send me blindness and every ailment . . ., "etc.

778 Anybs-nykha's residence is under the exclusive super-
[923] vision of the large Abkhaz family Ankhaë-Chichba. The Chichba have enjoyed this right for several generations; it is a source of great profit to them, since permission to bring sacrifices to this deity must be bought from them with presents. Not far from the top of Mt. Dudryuphsh, the actual abode of Anybs-nykha, a stone lies under an oak; on this stone the image of the Holy Virgin has been carved. All those who
[782] take an oath must put a coin or something metal under this stone, and woe to him who is tempted to take anything away, even one little thing, from among the objects lying there!

23.

/57/ Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve

782
[796] On Christmas Eve in every family chickens are killed
[262] and four kvakvari (small loaves of bread stuffed with cheese)

/57 cont./

[787] are made for each member of the family. The chickens
[796] must be fried and the kvakvari baked before cockcrow. Just
[262] after the first cockcrow the master of the house puts bowls on the table, into each of which he puts a chicken and four kvakvari; to each one he fastens a wax candle. A brazier with coals is placed near the table. All the members of the family kneel down around the table, each opposite his bowl,
[789] and the eldest person in the family, after removing his cap and throwing incense in the brazier, asks God to preserve him and his family from stomach disorders. After the prayer, all rise, turn to the right, and bow to the east; then everyone eats his portion, and each does his best to finish the meal without fail before dawn.

[796] On New Year's Eve, after supper, a prayer is again
[262] offered in each family to ask for all sorts of blessings. For this occasion a rectangular pie is prepared, stuffed with cheese; this is put on a board to which a wax candle is fastened. The whole family kneels around it, and the eldest in the clan throws incense on the coals and says the prayer; then the pie is eaten and the leftovers burned on the coals. This prayer is called Kalinda. On the first day of the New Year the prayer called Günykhva (prayer of the heart) is
[262] offered. For this, a small loaf of wheat-bread stuffed with an egg is prepared for each member of the family. The head of
[789] the family raises a loaf to the breast of each member, praying to God to preserve them from heart ailments. After the prayer, each one eats his loaf.

24.

Drought

731
789 During a severe summer drought all the village girls gather in their best attire near the river. They divide themselves into three groups and make a raft of branches, cover this with straw, and make a doll, which they then dress up as a /58/ woman. When all these preparations are finished, a

/58 cont./

731 donkey is brought, which they cover with a white sheet and
789 put the doll on it. One of the girls takes the donkey by the rein, while two others support the doll, and they set out for the place where the raft was made. The other girls accompany the procession on both sides, singing "dziva dziva
[539] dzvari! Kva kva mykryld aphsh-akh ipha did shivait dzy khychik, dzy khuchik," which means, "To get water, water! To get rainwater; a red daisy! Son of the Lord, we thirst for a little water, a little water!" When they come to the river, they take the doll from the donkey, put it on the raft, and, setting the straw afire, let it float downstream; they then try to chase the donkey into the water, which, of course, requires no small effort. At last the donkey is dragged into the river, and, emerging on the opposite bank, he begins
[825] to bray, which is considered the surest sign of forthcoming rain. If, however, the donkey fails to bray, the same ceremony is repeated anew on the following day or the next day after that.

25.

Saints

776 Independent of the general worship of all the deities dis-
778 cussed above, the inhabitants of the villages of Lykhny,
[184] Lzaa, and Ilori are under the protection of saints, to whom the churches erected in those villages are dedicated; or, more correctly, who are under the protection of the churches themselves. In Lykhny each family invokes the protection of Anan-Lykhnykh (the Virgin Mother of Lykhny), in Lzaa, of Anan-Lzaanykh (the Virgin Mother of Lzaa, i.e., the cathedral of Pitsunda dedicated to the Holy Virgin), in Ilori, of Tsminda Giorgi (the cathedral of St. George). To invoke
782 their protection, sacrifices must be offered, which are, in
[796] fact, brought by each family once a year on a Sunday evening.
[231] On the day set aside for the offering, the best year-old

C 796 C [782] [769 cont.] and lighted with lamps, is set up in the house of an elder of the kin group. An animal is sacrificed in honor of the god, and after the feast the cheese is distributed among the participants as a magical remedy. Other festivals are celebrated: for the new year and for Easter, in March, when one first fasts, then slaughters an offering in the sacred grove, and enjoys himself by shooting at eggs, etc.; at the beginning of the harvest, when roasted unripe wheat with sour milk, and later other kinds of grain and fruit, are eaten as festive dishes; in October when the plants wither, etc.

A 796 782 The Abkhaz show their reverence for the gods and spirits at given occasions or on certain holidays by the sacrificial offering of animals, milk, bread, and other things, and by prayers, which are often constructed with a wealth of words and are poetically exalted.

Thus, on New Year's Eve they kneel in prayer, sprinkling incense on a coal-pan, around a rectangular cheese-cake (suluguni)--this custom is called Kalinda, cf. the Kolinda of the Rumanians and others--and on New Year's Day the father of the house lays wheat bread with an egg baked in it on everyone's breast, and he directs the "heart-prayer" (gunykhwa) to God, that they may be protected from heart disease. On Christmas Day between the first crow of the cock and daybreak he begs that they be spared from stomach ailments; afterwards everyone eats a chicken and four small pieces of cheese-bread (kwakwarí). The celebration of Syosu is also held on New Year's Eve, especially by the smiths. Here the father of the house prays to him for health and protection against harm from their work tools, and he throws into the fire pieces of curd-cake and of the heart and liver from the sacrificial animals: a sheep or calf for the father of the house, a rooster for each member of the family [Familie].

A 233 [782] C [776] A [231] Before driving the animals into the mountains and after driving them from there, the herdsmen sacrifice a ram in honor of the god of lightning (Ap'i, khakhikal = he who lives above, called Sible by the Cherkess) and pray that he spare them and their herds. When an animal is killed by lightning, [770] the owner calls out all the villagers; while singing and dancing

3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
Adzvibzha

already collected for the writing of a full-size monograph dealing with the religious beliefs and customs of the K'art's, Ibers, and Svans. However, after some reflection I decided that the time was not ripe for such a task as some necessary data were lacking and I therefore decided to publish only the notes. Here and there, however, I have not been able to restrain myself from touching upon certain considerations and inquiries belonging to the larger plane, and these have overflowed in the form of footnotes.

The founders of Christianity, realizing that it was not so easy after all to eradicate from the consciousness of the majority of the population religious beliefs and rites observed for thousands of years, endeavoured to transform them, by wrapping them up in their own clothing and so adapting them to the Christian feasts and saints; thus they established their own annual festivals. Wherever possible I have followed in my account the established order of church festivals.

I should further point out that all the material herein described was collected in one village only, namely, Adzvibzha, in southern Abkhasia (the province of Abzhua), which, according both to Georgian and foreign (for instance, of the missionary A. Lamberti) historical sources constituted until the second half of the seventeenth century, part of Megrelia. This accounts for the fact that the Megrelian influence is so strongly noticeable. I think it is quite possible that some of the beliefs herein described may be capable of a different interpretation in Northern Abkhasia.

I begin my notes with Àyt'ar. In the first place, however, it will be expedient to explain my views on the chief deity *antswd*,* God.

Antswd is a compound word, consisting of *an*, "mother," and *tswa* (*ratswd*)—"many," which together denote "many mothers" or simply "mothers"; the word is thus in the plural form.[1] "In a formal or grammatical sense," says Dcharaia, "it is not an error; only the word 'mother' forms in the plural *dntswa* and 'God'—*antswd*, i.e. the difference is in the accent. But in colloquial speech both words,

* The underlined *tsw* is a trigraph representing a sound uttered with one articulative effort or breath impulse, of which the digraph "*ts*" represents the front lingual affricate equivalent to German "*z*" (*Zeit*, time), and the labial semi-vowel "*w*", the labialization of the preceding "*ts*". "*Tsw*" thus represents a labialized variety of "*ts*". See N. Y. Marr, *The Abkhasian Analytical Alphabet* (in Russian), Leningrad, 1926, p. 31. [Translator's Note.]

[1] It would be premature at this stage to enter into the question of the identification of the conception "god", in Abkhasian, with "mother", and any attempt to give a morphological explanation of the form, which is incontestably the plural in *-tswa*, with the aid of the Abkhasian word *ratswa* would be superfluous (see N. Marr, *Definition of the Language of the Second Category of the Achaemenian Cuneiform Inscriptions* (in Russian), in *Zapiski* (Bulletin) of the Eastern Branch of the Imperial Russian Archæological Society, St. Petersburg, 1915, §62. See also his *On the Origin of the Name Anapa* (in Russian). It is the usual linguistic method of the Abkhasians to interpret everything, even suffixes, such as the plural termination *-tswa* in the above instance, by means of the Abkhasian speech, with the aid of the Abkhasian words that survive to this day. [Note by the Editor of the *Kristianskii Vostok*.]

3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhaz RI3
Adzwibzhq

which is *Khetsia*.[1] He has one sister from whom descends the demon family; that is why *antswà* has no right to destroy once for all the demons, his blood relations.

The Abkhasians appear to have made their gods after the image of man; one and the same god can be both good and evil in relation to a given person, according to the zeal with which he fulfils his duties towards him. The only means by which an angered god can be placated is by open-hearted confession and sacrificial offerings. And as the Abkhasians have a great number of gods their whole life is passed in continuous prayer and offering to gods.

I. ÀYT'AR-NÒḪWA*

1. *Jabràn*

The Abkhasians make preparations for Shrovetide with particular solemnity, for its approach coincides with the observance of a series of religious rites and offerings, known under the general name of *Àyt'ar-nòḫwa*. Àyt'ar is a great god of procreation and fertility, particularly with regard to the breeding of cattle. He is, as we shall see presently, the head of a whole pleiade of gods, who appear to be subordinate to him, and each of whom constitutes a part of him. *Nòḫwa*, which is derived from *a-nòḫwara*, to pray, denotes praying, prayer, whence *Àyt'ar-nòḫwa*, meaning prayer, offering, to Ayt'ar.

The first in order of offerings is that performed in honour of the god *jabràn*, i.e. god of the goats (and sheep) (see above, p. 120).

On the Sunday, the last day of Shrovetide, the eldest woman of the family leavens dough from the flour of *ashò* (Georgian *shvria*, oat)[2] and places it in a warm corner. The dough is often kneaded with a stick, called *adswò*,† made specially for this purpose from the hazel tree, on account of which the dough itself is called *adswərəsa*, a combination of *adswò*, a stick with a tapering end, and *ərsara*, to knead.

On the Shrove Thursday the eldest woman of the family—*ap'hwəs-tsh'ya* ("woman pure")—takes a portion of this leaven, kneads it with the stick, adds some water and flour, boils it, and then bakes maizebread—*amgyal*. This maizebread must be baked on a hearth.

* For the pronunciation of "ḫ" see p. 119, n. *. The combination "ḫw" represents a labialized variety of "ḫ". [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

† The combination "*dsw*" which is to be pronounced with one breath impulse, represents a labialized variety of "*ds*". For this latter sound see p. 329 (*h'*). [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

[1] N. Y. MARR, *On the Religious Beliefs of the Abkhasians* (in Russian), in *Khristianskii Vostok*, "The Christian East," St. Pb., 1915, vol. iv, issue 1, p. 138.
(A translation of this work is given in this number, pp. 157–180, see p. 171. Ed. *Georgica*.)

[2] It should be noted that in all these sacrificial offerings oat flour and, on rare occasions, millet flour, is used. Without this flour or unless it is at least used as an ingredient the offering becomes inadmissible. The reason for this is probably because *ashò* (and *ghomi*, millet) alone constituted the staple food.

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When the woman places the dough on the hearth, she holds over it a pure *sulguni* (a round of cheese),[1] from the centre of which she cuts out a small round piece and places it in the middle of the maizebread; with the exception of this middle part, the maizebread is lenten. When placing the dough on the hearth, she scatters bits of it, first in the direction of the sea, and then towards the mountains; and, as if calling to the goats, she says, *reyt, reyt* (the goat call), and mutters the following prayer: "Thou, *jabràn*, the great part of the great god (*Àyt'ar intswakhwodù jabràn*)! Grant us the warmth of thine eyes and of thy heart. Be the guardian of our herds! Bear goodwill unto us so that no harm should befall our herds, except their old moulted wool and old dung!" Apart from this introduction, which is always used, each says an improvised prayer. After this is over, as if calling to the goats they again exclaim, *reyt, reyt*, turning alternatively towards the sea and the mountains.

When the maizebread is baked, and the goats have returned from the fields, the eldest man in the family prays to god *jabràn*, muttering approximately the formula quoted above. The whole family joins him in uttering *dämen*, and the candles are lighted.

It is to be noted that during the prayer the participants also invoke the "god" *mkyamgaria*,* and say: "May thy bounty never fall short on us." It seems to me that this deity is no other than the "Megrelianized" angels Michael and Gabriel (Geo. *Mik'el da Gabrieli*), with whom Christianity endeavoured, in vain, to replace Àyt'ar and his "parts" of gods; up to this day the pagan deities still take precedence, although they also pray to *mkyamgaria*.

The maizebread is first cut into four parts with two strokes of the knife, and only afterwards into small pieces; the neighbours are not forgotten either, a piece being sent to each. The maizebread is baked in rhododendron (*à-k'wazhwa*)† leaves.

2. *Zhwabràn* (god of cows)[2]

This rite is performed in the same manner as jabràn. The prayer begins thus: "Thou *zhwabràn*, the great part (of the great deity)

* The palatal or mid-lingual semi-vowel "*y*" in "*k'y*", "*gy*", as also in "*ky*", "*wy*", "*shy*", "*qy*", etc., met with in this article, lingualizes or iotizes the preceding consonant sound, the combinations "*k'y*", "*gy*", etc, representing lingualized or iotized varieties of "*k'*", "*g*" (pronounced hard, as in "go"), etc. For the pronunciation of simple radical sounds see p. 328. [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

† See p. 131, note *.

[1] In Abkhasian *àshyashwa*, pure cheese; cf. Megrelian (I. Kipshidze, *The Megrelo-Russian Dictionary*, s.v. *ant'ari*) *tsh'obas*, which is also an Abkhasian expression, denoting "pure (*a-tsh'ya*), good (*à-bas*)".

[2] In Guria this observance is known under the name of *boslobs* (an abstract form of *bosli*, cowhouse) or *ilorobs*; the latter probably has some connection with St. George of Ikori. The Gurians often call a cow *ilora*. In Megrelia the god of cattle-breeding is known as *Zhini-Ant'ar*.

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Àyt'ar!" etc. The dough is kneaded from the same leaven, only when calling to the cows they exclaim *wootsw*. Shrove Saturday is dedicated to *zhwabrdn*.

3. *Anàkha-nàĥwa* (*Dopu-nàkha*)

Near Adzvibzha is a little village called Dopukət, where dwell the Dopua-s who are attendants (Geo. *me-khat-ur-i*) of the "icon"—*Dopu-nàkha*, revered by all the Adzvibzhaans and Dopukətans. This "icon" is known also as *zhwəjən-nàkha*, i.e. Sujuna icon, under which is meant, no doubt, St. George of Sujuna in Megrelia. This "icon" is called *zhwardk'yə* by the wives of the Dpua-s, for the reason that the wives of Abkhasians have no right to call by name the eldest members of their husband's *gvari*, or his relations. D. I. Gulia thinks that the word *zhwarak'yə* is the same as the Georgian *zvarahi*, meaning sacrificial animal (the ancient Georgian *zuaraki* = *zowarahi*, Armenian *zowarak*).[1] In honour of this "icon" every Adzvibzhaan and Dopukətan family bakes, on the Shrove Sunday, a cake from millet flour (*sorghum*, in Geo. *ghomi*), which is offered as a gift to it. Prayers are said by the head of each family, and a handful of salt and a piece of wax candle are put aside for the "icon". The eldest of the Dopua goes round the houses and collects the salt and wax.

Mamsər Dopua told us: "At the present time our icon is in the village Sujuna."

4. *Àyt'ar-nàĥwa* (*khwazhwà-kwà*, in the Bzyb dialect *khwazhw-kwà*)

On the first Monday[2] of the Great Fast the ritual of supplication to Àyt'ar himself is observed. This supplication is otherwise called *khwazhwà-kwà* (in the Bzyb dialect *khwazhw-kwà*). *À-khwazhwà* (Bzyb. *à-khwazhw*) is a special cake, sometimes coniform, and sometimes of round flattened shape. These cakes, which may be stuffed with cheese or not, but on this occasion are lenten, are invariably included in sacrificial offerings of the Abkhasians. They may be boiled, as on this occasion, or baked. *A-kwà* denotes "to hold". After it is called, in Abkhasian, the month of February, *khwazhwəkàn-mzà* (*a-mza*, month, moon). *À-khwazhwə* (Bzyb. *à-khwazhw*) denotes also rhododendron, the leaves of which are indispensable in the making of sacrificial maize-cakes.

[1] As a cult term this word is met with in the form زبح in Sabaean (Chwolsohn, *Die Ssabier*, ii, 24, 87, cf. p. 191, n. 179), see N. Marr, *The Baptism of the Armenians, Georgians, Abkhasians and Alans*, etc. (in Russian), in *Zapiski* (Bulletin) of the Eastern Branch of the Imperial Russian Archæological Society, St. Pb., 1908, vol. xvi, p. 203. (Ed. *Khrist. Vost.*)

[2] The Megrelians call this Monday *t'at'ashkhe bedshvi*, lucky, or happy Monday, lit. the moon-day. With the Abkhasians, too, *Ayt'ar's* day is Monday; they pray to the moon exclusively on Mondays.

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sacrificial maize-cakes. Also on this day, in the early evening, are prepared from the above-mentioned leaven many *à-khwazhwə*, and three loaves, made in the shape, respectively, of the moon, the sun, and *alaẖwara*.[1] In the latter are placed as many *aklakŭt-s* (little wooden hammers, models of those used in threshing millet, or maize) as there are women in the family and an extra one symbolizing the desire for their increase. This correlation of the number of hammers with the number of women in the family arose, of course, from the fact that the threshing of millet was the woman's job. Soups of phasel and of fresh nettle (*à-khwats*) are also prepared. On this day no edible herb of any kind is allowed to be consumed, or used in cooking; *dsdsəm*, the Abkhasians say, that is, "it is not proper," "it is forbidden" (in Megrelian *vashiners*).

Late in the afternoon, when the cattle have returned from the fields, the prayers begin.

(*a*) *Antswà-ẖwa* (for God).[2]

The whole family gathers together. On the threshold of the house, *dishwa*, is placed a long and narrow table (in Megrelian *tabaki*), on which are laid all the eatables described above. Behind this little table stands the head of the family, and behind him all the other members. The wax candles are lighted. The head of the family takes three *à-khwazhwə*, and, addressing *Antswà*, God, prays that His favours and bounties may be showered upon his family, etc. The family repeat with him, *dămen*. These cakes are put aside.

(*b*) *Àyt'ar*.

After this the head of the family takes three new *a-khwazhwə*, and says: *Wa, Àyt'ar—bzhwàyt'ar! bzhyə-nɔ̀khak zɔnàp-yanŭ, bzhyə—tswəmzàk zɔ̀kɔdɪ—dso*, etc., "*O, Àyt'ar—seven Àyt'ar, in the hands of whom are seven icons (to whom are subject seven gods), and to whom are lit seven candles,"—be thou the guardian of our herds! Multiply them so that we may milk seven men's load of milk! Let no harm come to our herd, except the old wool and old dung!* etc. The introduction, given in Abkhasian, is uttered by all, while everybody improvises the rest of the supplication as best they can, repeating the mystic number seven every minute. As is shown by the introduction *Àyt'ar* is the head of a group of seven gods. The number seven appears in many prayers.[3]

[1] *Alaẖwara*—a large mortar (Geo. *tchashuri*) in which millet (*ghomi*) is husked.

[2] *hwa* is an abbreviated form of the word denoting "he says"; cf. the Russian *govt* heard in the existing colloquial speech.

[3] All this, and the fact that the Abkhasians up to this day still pray to the moon and the sun, makes us wonder whether the septenary *Ayt'ar* is closely connected with the Babylono-Assyrian septenary of gods, particularly as the names of the gods *An, Anu—Anigal*, and *Istar—Ayt'ar*, are very similar, while the moon and the sun are included in both pleiades.

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The Megrelians also know this septenary, *shk'vit'-ul-i*, in honour of which the majority of families let loose a cow with a pierced ear. Her milk is not used for food. The bullock is offered in sacrifice, while the heifer is reared. The well-known Pshav *Kviria* is, perhaps, related to Megrelian Àyt'ar. I have pointed out above that among the Megrelians the god of cattle-breeding is called *Zhini Ant'ar*. *Ant'ar* is the Abkhasian *Àyt'ar*, while *zhini*, in Megrelian, "high," "heavenly," is equivalent to Abkhasian *khikh*. The Abkhasians, however, appear to have split up *Zhini Ant'ar* into two gods, *Àyt'ar* and *Khikh*. They appeal for help to the latter in the spring, when the cattle are taken to the mountain pastures. They pray to him under the shadows of trees. On four pillarets are placed poles, which are covered with leaves of trees, particularly of the wild hazel tree, the oak, or yoke-elm. A cheese curd wrapped in chestnut tree bark is placed on this table (*ashwamkyàt'*)* which is covered with greenery; on it is also placed *àchamak'wa*, a kind of millet porridge, cooked with cheese. In front of it is also placed milk gruel. Women are not allowed to be present. The head of the family, standing with uncovered head in front of this green table, called *ashwamkyàt'*, prays that *Khikh*, the great part of the great deity Àyt'ar, may increase his cattle and send all good things. While praying he spills a little of the gruel towards the sea and towards the mountains, uttering *wootsw*. The prayer over, he takes the cheese curd and passes over it cross-wise a hazel "knife", which is really a stick cut into a tapering, knife-like shape, after which he actually cuts the cheese curd with a real knife.[1] This ceremony of prayer is followed by a dinner, the remains of which are not cleared away. Three of the supports or legs of *ashwamkyàt'* are cut off (each with one stroke), the fourth remains there untouched. It seems to me probable that the table itself received its name from this act of cutting. Megrelians also know this *ashwamkyàt'*, which they call *sumket* (*sumi keti*), "three sticks," derived, perhaps, from *sumkvat'*, in which case it would denote "three cuttings" (*kvat'* < *kvat'ua* = to cut, to fell), i.e. "cut with three strokes."[2]

The Georgian Mountaineers also have their *Anator-i*.

(c) *Alòshkintr* (*alòskintr*).

These cakes are also put aside. The prayer now takes three new

* The combination *shw* represents a labialized variety of "*sh*"; *cf.* "*zhw*", p. 120, note *. In *ashwamkyàt'* the "*sh*" is not only labialized, but also lingualized or lotised, which lingualization is not, however, represented in the transcription. [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

[1] By using the wooden knife, the Abkhasian probably pays tribute to that very ancient time when his ancestors used that kind of knife.

[2] If the first part *sumsu* represents the Megrelian word "three", one should keep in mind not the "K'art'lianized" form *sumi*, but the original, Tubal-Kainian *shumi*; see Marr, *From the Journies to Semis* (in Russian), in *Christ. Vostok*, ii, pp. 17–18. (Editor, *Christ. Vost.*)

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[196] *à-khwazhw* and entreats god *Alèshkintr* to grant the house faithful dogs—those best friends of man and reliable watchers of his weal; the prayer at the same time spills some of the hot *a-k'warèpà* or *a-*
[260] *k'warpà* (a thick broth of *à-khwazhw*, or millet) towards the sea and some towards the mountains, uttering "*Wootsw!* Burn out the tongue
[158] of the evil-speaker, the eyes of the evil-eyed", and continues his prayer.
[116] In the opinion of the commission, *Alèshkintr* is also "part" of *Àyt'ar*. *Ala* denotes dog; *shkintr*, however, is incomprehensible.

The commission explained that "dog" was mentioned before
[233] "man" on account of the former being more capable of loyalty to a master than the latter.

671 It should be noted that the common law values the blood of a
685 dog in proportion to that of its owner; the blood of a baron's dog is
825 equal to that of a baron, of a peasant's to that of a peasant, etc.

539 From the lips of K. Dolbaia (Abkh. Delba), an 80-year-old Abkha-
231 sian, who possesses an expert knowledge of the Abkhasian language, I wrote down the following tale:—

"In ancient times, when Abkhasia was inhabited by giants and devas (daevas), Aslan, one of the giants, would not leave the devas in peace. Once, when he was asleep, the devas crept up stealthily, bound him with silk laces, blinded and killed him, and threw him into a pit as deep as a well. On their return from their usual hunting expedition, his dogs discovered their master, but they could not pull him out of the well. They fell upon an ox-cart driver who happened to be passing by, and compelled him to rescue their master from the well and unbind him. The dogs licked Aslan for three days and three nights, and so brought him back to life and restored his sight." [1]

The following superstition prevails among the Abkhasians. If
[827] someone, noticing the heavens bursting open, succeeds in uttering *Làri, vàri, khəzò, jkhwàri*, he will have all his wishes fulfilled. Only one woman was honoured with this great good fortune, the widow of a Mukvabba. *Làri* is interpreted as *lala* which denotes dog; *vàri*
[192] (*wàri* from *aowyò*,* man) as man; *khəzò* as whey; *jkhwàri* as the crust of millet porridge; uttered together they are supposed to mean "make me rich". My Abkhasian advisers repeatedly emphasized that the dog was mentioned first because of its unexampled loyalty and fidelity to man, his master.

1116 (*d*) *Àmza-nəkwa*, Prayer to the Moon.
1196 The supplicant takes the moon-shaped cake and says: "Thou,

[104] * See p. 122, note *. According to Marr, the throat participates vigorously in the pronunciation of this composite or diffusive sound, and in a way as if the sound of the guttural "ع" (the ancient Arabic '*ain*) were also heard. [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

[1] The Academician N. Y. Marr has kindly directed my attention to Moses of
[171] Khoren, who describes how by order of Semiramis, the dogs of *Arsâk* (cf. *Alèshkintr*) licked the corpse of *Aru* or *Arsès*, the Armenian Prince, in order to revive him.

Àmza, the great part of the great god *Àyt'ar*, guard over our men! Grant them beauty and strength!" Simultaneously the men-folk crowd around him, for the moon is the god of men; the women-folk stand at a distance. "Increase our cattle and all our weal! Burn out the eyes of the spell-binders, and the tongues of the evil-speakers! *Wootsw, Wootsw!*" the supplicant continues his incantation and, calling to the cattle, spills *k'uarpa* (*a-k'warpà* or *a-k'wərpà*) now in the direction of the sea, now towards the mountains.

"The moon is a man, and the sun is a woman," say the Abkhasians.

I will now quote from my notes the following brief account of a very characteristic Abkhasian tale:

(1) "Seven very rich Abkhasian brothers had no sisters; whereat they were very aggrieved. Eventually, however, a sister was born, but from that moment the wealth of the brothers began to diminish; every night some invisible power drove away their cattle in herds. The youngest brother who was endowed with the gift of prescience (*ashàna*) said to the others: 'A demon has entered our house in the guise of our sister; if we do not kill him, our days and those of all in the whole district are numbered!' The brothers, however, would not listen to him. Thereupon he left his home, and travelled abroad, where he married a beautiful maiden-sun (*Àmra*). After several years, feeling home-sick, he set out to visit his brothers. Alas! what did he find? There was nobody left alive in the whole district except a mouse and his own sister-demon (the witch). She at once devoured his horse, and stepped aside to sharpen her teeth. On the advice of the mouse, the moon-brother, to save his life, took to his heels; he managed to inform his wife-sun of his misfortune, who hastened to deliver him. But the sister overtook her brother and began to devour him. By this time his wife Àmra had arrived. She pulled her husband, *Àmza*, towards her, but the demon pulled also; and so a deadlock ensued. *Antswà* decided the matter thus: he allowed the wife-sun to have her husband, the moon, for fifteen days, and the demon to have him for the remaining fifteen days of the month. And from that time began the phases of the moon. As soon as the moon becomes full it means that the demon has begun to devour Àmza, on which account the moon diminishes gradually; towards the end of Àmza's life his wife, full of love, comes to the rescue of her unfortunate husband, and as her caresses and care restore him to life the moon waxes again. When it is full the demon reappears and the story repeats itself!"

(2) "The Eclipse of the Moon. During the eclipse a monster, Atv (*Àtwyə*), falls upon the moon to devour it. In order to save their

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539 [789] benefactor, the moon, the Abkhasians fire at the monster and thereby drive him away." [1]

(3) The Moon and the Sun. A beautiful Abkhasian widow woman had a son and a daughter, who often absented themselves from home for the whole day; they would go off early in the morning and return only late in the evening. No amount of coaxing or tenderness on the part of the mother sufficed to keep the children at home or stop them from indulging in their daily adventure, so she decided to shadow them. She found they were seated under the shadow of an ancient oak, in a thick forest, enjoying themselves in an agreeable pastime with the moon and the sun. Before them were all sorts of eatables. The mother, flying into a passion, flung fresh dung at the moon and the sun. The sun-sister, being a more fastidious creature, washed herself, but the less particular moon-brother did not do so, and hence arose the dark patches on the moon; the brother, the moon, and the sister, the sun,[2] then soared up to the sky for ever, while the widow and her children returned home."

821 Here I will also note that the Abkhasians always welcome the new moon by looking at its reflection through a mirror, or over a silver piece.

[753] A certain mainly infantile disease, similar to convulsions, is called by the Abkhasians *dmzakra*, i.e. " to be caught by the moon ".

(e) *Àmra-nə̀hwa*, Prayer to the Sun.

194 [716] When he has finished the invocation addressed to Àmza (the moon), the supplicant takes the sun-shaped cake, and, with the women surrounding him, he says: " Thou, Àmra, *Àyt'ar intswakhwdə̀*, the great part of the great *Àyt'ar*, grant warmth, and caress the women of our family! Increase our cattle," etc., and then spills *k'warpə* (*a-k'warpà*) in the usual manner, uttering *wootsw*.

According to D. I. Gulia, in the village of Dchilou they use the form *Amera* instead of *Àmra*.

(f) *Anàp'a-nàga*.

[716] After that the supplicant takes *alaxwdra* (a large mortar) and, addressing himself to the god *Anàp'a-nàga*, says: " Thou, the great part of the great god *Àyt'ar*, send us the warmth of thine eyes and of

[92] [1] Exactly what *Atàwyə* denotes is difficult to explain. In connection with the above quoted tale, the etymology of this word may, however, perhaps elucidate its significance. *Atà* denotes the barn- or screech-owl; *wy* may be the root from the word *a-awyà* (man); consequently *atàwyə* may denote " man-owl ". And by *atàwyə* is, perhaps, understood the sister devouring the brother-moon.

[2] Their gender is often confused: sometimes the moon and the sun are sisters or brothers, sometimes the moon is brother and the sun sister.

[3] I think the Georgian word *mizezi*, cause, is derived from the Abkhasian *amaza*, cause (from *àmza*, moon). (It is doubtful! Ed. *Khrist. Vost.*)

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thy heart! Grant us such a crop of maize that at its gathering we shall have to bend the stalks with a hook (Geo. *Kavi*), and cut them down with a bill!" *K'uarpa* (*a-k'wərpə́*) is then spilled, and the cattle is called by shouting *wootsw*. *Anàp'a-nàga* is the harvest god. In my opinion the etymology of these words is as follows: *Ap'arə́* denotes "to twist or twine" something (a rope, for example), as well as "to pass with difficulty through something", for instance, a maize or millet field, crowd, etc.; *nàgara*—to carry: *inap'bo indgə*—carriest thou by forcing thy way, by pushing asunder.

There is also an evil spirit of the harvest called *Jaja*, but we will speak of her (she is a goddess) separately, as she is not a member of this septenary.

(*g*) *Atchshə̀-shyashyə́na* (god of horses).

Finally, the supplicant takes the cake whose shape represents a horse (or three *ə-khwazhwə*), and entreats (the god) *Atchshə̀ shyashyə́na* —the great part of the great god *Àyt'ar*, to increase his horses (donkeys and asses). Again *wootsw* and *ak'warpə́*. The word *atchshə̀* denotes horse; *shwyashyə́na* or *shashana* is incomprehensible.

With this ceremonial *Àyt'ar-nə̀hwa* ends.

Judging from what has already been said above, it is clear that *Àyt'ar* is the head of a whole pleiade of gods, each of whom constitute a special part of him; it is noteworthy that in every supplication addressed to any one of these gods, *Àyt'ar* is also invariably referred to as one whose part is the deity in question. The religio-philosophical mind of the Abkhasians has arranged the hierarchy of these gods in the following order:—

ÀYT'AR: JABRÀN, ZHWÀBRÀN, ALÀSHKINTR, ÀMZA, ÀMRA, ANÀP'A-NÀGA; AND ÀTCHSHÀ-SHYASHYÀNA.

Àyt'ar is one in seven parts. This conception of God in parts is prominently expressed in *Àyt'ar*.

(*h*) *Làmilah* (*Nəmirah* or *Shəmirah*).

Àyt'ar-nə̀hwa ends with *Làmilah*. What this word denotes is difficult to explain. It appears to denote the god of conjugal happiness of the youth.

On the same evening, after the conclusion of *Àyt'ar-nə̀hwa*, the young people, boys and girls, meet at one of their houses, and begin to predict their fortunes. It is a time of laughter and gaiety, and the young people enjoy themselves to their hearts' content. *A-kwakwàr* of usual size is prepared in great quantities; and also enough of a smaller size, extremely salt in flavour, to enable each participant to have three. In one of these small *akwakwàr* is placed a hazel chip, called *ànasp'adzw*, "stake of happiness." Each person is given three

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small salt *akwakwàr*. They then go out into the garden and eat their scones in silence in the dark, at the same time entreating *Làmilaà* to bestow upon them a happy married life. Whoever finds the "stake of happiness" in his or her scone must celebrate this stroke of luck by giving a party for all the participants. On the following day the *Làmilaà* party is given at the house of the lucky one. After consuming the little *akwakwàr* all go back into the house and sit down to a supper which is also an occasion for gaiety. In order to maintain the feeling of thirst at its strongest, no one is allowed to drink anything. The Abkhasians believe that the thirsty person will be given a drink by the one with whom he or she is fated to share conjugal life. In such manner do the young people of Abkhasia tell their fortunes.[1]

II. ÀMSHAP'

In this chapter I have collected together all those rites grouped around the festival of Easter, called in Abkhasian *Àmshap'*.[2] The *Àmshap'* celebrations began[3] two weeks before Easter Sunday, and continued for exactly three weeks, during which time custom forbade working in the field, except in the cotton field and the kitchen garden. On Sunday, two weeks before Easter Day, the Abkhasians decorated their houses with the first spring flowers, and this Sunday is called *aioba*, which is derived, probably, from the Megrelian *aia*, violet. Until *aioba*, playing football or other games was forbidden. After that day, however, seasonal games were in full swing. Dressed in their finest attire, the whole population gave themselves up to public sports. Among the most popular pastimes were football, wrestling, stone throwing, trick-riding, dancing, singing, and *akyəbir* (in Geo. *riktap'ela*, "game of skittles," according to Tchubinashvili's or Tchubinov's Dictionary).

The following Sunday—Palm Sunday—the Abkhasians call *baioba* (a "Megrelianization"). The name is derived from *a-baia*, a yellow flower which grows profusely in the fields of Abkhasia in the early spring.[4] On this day also the Abkhasians decorated their houses with flowers, particularly with *abaia*.

[1] *Anasp'a dzw* has its double in Guria and Imeret'i *bedis-kveri*, cracknel of fate, which is known also to the Tiflis Armenians. I think the Pshav *dzedsola* arose on this ground.

[2] It is, in my opinion, a compound word, consisting of *amsh*, day, and *ap'* (*yap'u*), accepted, appointed, fixed; *Àmshap'* thus denotes "pre-ordained day" (Geo. *mighebuli dghe*).

[3] These celebrations are no longer observed; they are traditional, and I am describing them from memory, or from the words of the Commission.

[4] According to Tchubinashvili (Tchubinov), and to R. Erist'avi (Eristov), *baia* is crows-foot, *ranunculus*. Erist'avi, considering the word to be Megrelo-Imero-Gurian, gives as its K'art'(l)ian equivalent *tskhviris-satekhela*. The word *a-baia*, in Abkhasian *a-mərtch*, is, according to the botanists of the Sukhum Botanical Garden, the equivalent of the Russian *lyutik ledbi*.

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1. *Adzɨrga-khwasha*

Either during the night before *baioba*, or, according to some members of the Commission, on the Wednesday evening of Passion-week, is observed the rite of binding legs with wool threads. Having supped early, the family retires to bed, each individual thrusting out his or her right leg from under the blanket. The eldest woman in the family stands on a stool in the middle of the room, and spins thread from wool. She does her work in silence. Having spun the required quantity, she quietly approaches the beds, and binds with this thread the right leg of each of their occupants, murmuring: "May God grant thee to see such days for a hundred years!" *Adzɨrga* (more correctly, *adzɨga*) denotes a thick thread; *a-khwasha*—Friday, so that this rite was in former days, probably, observed on Fridays. The threads were afterwards burnt on the fire under the small cauldron in which was boiled the meat of the sacrificial animal, on Easter Day.

2. *K'wab-gharghar*[*]

As soon as the binding ceremony was finished, the woman seized a copper cauldron, or a copper basin, and struck it like a gong, shouting at the top of her voice: "We have beaten! We have beaten!" The whole family then ran out into the garden, shouting *shwaḥ'waf'weyt!* "We have beaten you (outstripped)!" The "beaten" neighbours, annoyed to find themselves "beaten", immediately fell upon them, and a mock battle ensued. The battle was fought, of course, entirely as a joke, and with great merriment. In ancient times, a whole village often went to "battle" against another, beating copper cauldrons and basins. The "battle" was followed by dances and fun-making continuing till the dawn. *A-k'wab* denotes cauldron of copper, *gharghar*, knock, rap, clatter of a copper cauldron or basin.

3. *Aqaf'wara*

This Abkhasian term denotes the following superstition: an Abkhaz considers it a great misfortune if he hears the warbling or chirping of a swallow or the call of a cuckoo, before he has had his breakfast (or has at any rate partaken of salt); the bird will have "beaten" him, and this he regards as a great misfortune. In order to avoid this he eats salt, or something salt-flavoured immediately on rising from bed, which means that he has won the "contest".[1]

[*] The labial semi-vowel "*w*" in "*k'w*", "*t'w*", as also in "*ḥw*", "*fw*", etc., met with in this article, labializes the preceding consonant sound, the combination "*k'w*", "*ḥw*", etc., representing labialized varieties of "*k'*", "*ḥ*", etc. [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

[1] Georgians also have such a superstition.

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4. *The Gathering of Medicinal Herbs*

On Maundy Thursday, young maidens, led by old women, go into a forest early before the dawn, to gather medicinal herbs. They must neither converse nor look back. When they dig out the herb, they throw salt into the soil, murmuring "*Ádgilə-dedop'al, bəkhuə bàłt'eyt*, the Queen-Earth, we have returned to thee thy share". The following herbs are considered as particularly healing: (*a*) *ajmshyə-rshwəga, Arum albispatum*,[1] literally denoting: *ajmshyə*, eyebrow; *ashwəga*, "that with which they paint (a paint)"; it is used against diphtheria and scarlet fever; (*b*) *aztqyil* or *abgar lomha, Aristolochia pontica*[1] (birthwort); the second Abkhasian term denotes, literally, "jackal's ear," used against erysipelas (St. Anthony's fire); and (*c*) *ajaqwa*, veratrum, according to Tchubinov (Geo. *Kharis-dziria*). Having finished gathering, they return home in silence and without looking back.

Maundy Thursday is called by the Abkhasians *tchatchkhadəl*, derived, in all probability, from the Megrelian *tsashkha didi*, "the great Thursday."

5. *Jaja*[2]

On Maundy Thursday the Abkhasians offer a sacrifice to the goddess of fruitfulness (of husbandry and horticulture) called *Jaja*. For this occasion the Abkhasian women prepare all sorts of lenten dishes, taking care always to include a pumpkin. The dishes are placed outside the house, in a corn-field, the offering to *Jaja* being accompanied by a supplication as follows: "The great *Jaja*! We have done all that was required of us, and have made the customary offering. We therefore humbly entreat thee to show thy bounty towards us and grant us a good harvest in the field and in the kitchen garden!" As I have stated before, the Abkhasians have no set prayer formulas, and each prays as best he can.

As always, the offering is left for a few minutes wherever it was placed, and the supplicants stand before it, and watch with emotion how the spirit of the goddess invisibly satiates herself with the gifts of men! Needless to say they themselves consume the "remains".

As I have already remarked, there are two Abkhasian gods of fruitfulness: the god *Anàp'a-nàga* and the goddess *Jaja*.[3] *Jaja*, as imagined by an Abkhaz, is a broad-shouldered woman, of small stature. More than once Abkhasians have seen her wandering about the fields

[1] According to the botanists of the Sukhum Botanical Garden.

[2] It is of interest to elucidate what relation *Jaja* holds to Georgian *jojoba*; see I. Javakhishvili, *A History of the Georgian Nation* (in Georgian), p. 136.

[3] The relation of these two gods is difficult to determine; nor do we know the relation of *Jaja* to *Ayt'ar*.

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belonging to those who have failed to propitiate her, and muttering: "Corncobs (of Indian corn) of a digit size, corncobs of a digit size!" But if the owner of the field succeeds in frightening her and making her say *rȧki, dzakȉ, rȧki dzakȉ*, "of a cubit size," he will have a magnificent harvest.

On the day of *tchatchkhadȍl*, after the offering has been made to *Jaja*, the seeds are taken for the first time into the kitchen garden.

6. *Ȧmshaƥ'*

Easter Day is celebrated with great solemnity by all the Abkhasians. It must be noted that the Abkhasians to-day have no notion whatever of the Christian conception of this day. Even the greeting, "Christ is risen," usual on this day, is wanting in the Abkhasian language. Everyone able to afford it has a new dress made for this day. To emphasize the poverty of a person the Abkhaz says, "Even for *Ȧmshaƥ'* he could not get himself new clothes." This is almost the only day when an Abkhaz considers it necessary to send to church at least one of the members of his family. And the service in the church begins early enough to enable it to be finished by sunrise. Everyone is in haste to be the first to light a wax candle and to place a painted egg on the graves of their dead. The Muhammadan Abkhasians also follow this custom, although they do not light the candles. It is known that Abkhasians bury their dead near their homes, in the places favoured by the deceased, and the graves, therefore, are scattered about the village. Owing to this custom the whole village is illuminated on this day of *Ȧmshaƥ'*.

On this day each family must slaughter some animal. And those of the Abkhasians who follow the established custom of Paschal offerings, immolate two or three animals according to what his obligation is, what he "owes"—this word denotes "obliged", "must", "owes".

(*a*) *Anṭswakhwȍ* (or *Anṭswakwa*).

This is a compound word, consisting of *Anṭswȁ*, God, and (*a*)-*khwȍ*, part, share, and denoting "share of God", "for God", more exactly "to render to God that which is due to Him", briefly "praying to God". On this day most of the Abkhasians reverently offer up their prayers to God; but not all of them. There are families who are "not obliged" to render to God "His share". I have already mentioned that the Abkhasian makes offerings only to those gods under whose power his parents or he himself had come, and thus had become his tributary, so to speak. Very often separate members of a family have, in addition to the general family guardian-gods, their own personal

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guardians, whose power extends to his descendants, but not to those of his brothers or sisters. In the village of Adzvibzha almost everyone is obliged to carry out this " praying to God ", Christians as well as Muhammadans.

Every Abkhaz keeps in his cellar, in honour of " God ", a special pitcher filled with must of the very best grade. However great his need, an Abkhaz will not, for any consideration in the world, open this " sacrificial " pitcher until the celebration of the cult of " praying to God ".[1] Early in the morning, on returning from the church, the head of the family surrounded by the male members of his household, sacrifices a young he-goat over the " sacrificial " pitcher, and entreats " the great God to receive graciously the humble offering made by him in accordance with the instructions of his forefathers . . ." He humbly entreats the Great God " punish us not for our faults and trespasses ", etc. After this the meat of the immolated goat is boiled, and sacrificial wheat-cakes are baked. All this is taken down into the cellar, and placed in front of the sacrificial pitcher. The members of the family kneel down, while the head of the family reverently cleans and opens the pitcher, and, holding in his left hand a hazel stick upon which the heart and liver of the goat are transfixed, he prays *Antsa-du* (to great God) that He grant him and his family a long and happy life. In his prayer he never fails to mention that they are performing the rite " in the manner they were taught by their fathers and grandfathers ". Afterwards he fills a glass with wine from the pitcher and pours it on the heart and liver and the sacrificial cakes; he then passes the latter, with the wine, three times over the heads of the supplicants who are kneeling down, and says: " Grant us the warmth of Thine eyes and of Thine heart! Protect us from all infirmities and sickness." Then follows again the libation of wine Now they all rise, turn round from right to left, and each places a piece of frankincense on burning coals. For a few minutes they all stand still humbly, while the great God " receives " their offerings, and then, with strict observation of order of seniority, a glass of wine and a small piece of the heart and liver is given to each of the participants. It should be noted that only the household members are allowed to partake of these sacrificial offerings. Even the married daughters of the family are treated as strangers, and they are not allowed to share in the offerings with their husbands and children. It is sinful even to think of the sale of the wine. In most of the families the female sex is generally forbidden to partake of this offering.

Thus do the Abkhasians perform annually the domestic offering to God of " His share ". But every three to five years each Abkhas

[1] The same applies to other " sacrificial pitchers " referred to below.

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is obliged to present "His share" (offering) to God, in a forest, for which purpose a clearing is chosen under the shadow of a tree, oak or yoke-elm. Here is offered usually a castrated goat the age of which is equal to the number of years since the Abkhaz last prayed in the forest. Women are not allowed to take part in this rite, although they help to prepare the sacrificial cakes. The prayer is said by the elder of the *grari*, who receives the hide of the immolated animal. The offering takes place in front of *ashwamkydt'* (described above). The prayer ceremonial is the same as in the case of the domestic offering, although the pitcher of wine kept in the cellar is not used; for the purpose of the oblation a little wine is brought in a smaller pitcher. All the men in the neighbourhood participate in the ceremony, and when it is over they seat themselves on the grass; herbage is placed in front of them, and on this is served the dinner. A small piece of the heart and liver of the immolated animal is given to each of the participants. All the sacrificial food must be consumed on the spot; nothing may be taken home. The horns of the victim are hung high above the *ashwamkydt'* and left there. Three legs of *ashwamkydt'* are then cut, and the assembly disperses.

Some families dedicate to *Antswahwə* cows which are let loose with perforated ears (see above, p. 125); these cows are called *adzatwə*, which is difficult to translate; it apparently denotes "pledge", "security". Bullocks born of these cows are offered in sacrifice in place of castrated goats.

(b) *Aylər-nəkha*.

On the same day, simultaneously with *Antswakhwə*, a sacrifice is offered to *Aylr-nəkha* (*Ilər-nəkha*). The ceremony of offering the sacrifice is exactly similar to that described above. There is the same "wine pitcher", goat, cakes, and the same manner of praying. Also, at certain intervals, the sacrifice is made in the woods, in the manner described above. Many keep *adzatw* cows in honour of the Ilori icon. The only difference being that women have a freer access to these offerings than to *Antswakhwə*. Here I will note that if the pitcher for the "sacrificial wine" becomes in any way damaged (even if only slightly chipped), a new one, larger and dearer, must be substituted without fail. This is a general rule for all pitchers of this kind.

Aylər-nəkha (*Ilər-nəkha*) denotes the "icon of Ilori". This appears to be the same icon of St. George, which is kept in the small, walled-in church of the village of Ilori. This village is situated on the seashore, three miles from Otchemtchire. What is this Ilori icon? Which saint does it represent? For what is this saint remarkable? The contemporary Abkhaz has no notion whatever. The masses do not know to this day that it is the image of St. George. All they know

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ox of a certain colour. If the miracles you talk so much about are true, it should be an easy matter for St. George to bring my ox into this church to-night; then, certainly, I will gladly embrace your Faith.' The condition was accepted. On the following morning, early, on opening the gates, there was found within the enclosure an ox which the unbeliever recognized as his own. Thus he was convinced of his error, and embraced the Christian Faith."[1]

(c) *Indl-qwùba.*

The *T'avadi*-s Marshania, and all those Abkhasians who descended from the mountains (Dsabalaa, Dalaa, Pskhvu, etc.), offer sacrifices (a ram, without fail) in exactly the same manner to a sanctity, *Indl-qwùba*, instead of to the Ilori "icon". I could obtain no information of any kind about this "icon". Everybody I questioned gave the same answer: *Indl-qwùba* is equal in power to *Dadèrop'sh* and the Ilori "icon".

These offerings are performed early in the morning, and serve as breakfasts. Every Abkhaz slaughters some animal for the meal (the favourite one is a castrated goat), it is often prepared on the Saturday. They also pay the customary Paschal visits. After the midday sacrificial meal they all go to the public square, where they indulge in games, chiefly football. During Easter week they also organize horse racing, the most popular sport of the Abkhasians.

7. *The Second Day of Easter*

This is a commemoration day. A variety of dishes are prepared, all of which are placed on a table by an open window. The eldest of the family, holding a candle and a glass of wine in his hands, prays to the souls of deceased relatives that they grant his family peace and happiness. Then follows the pouring of wine on the meat and wheat dishes. The whole family stand behind the supplicant. After the prayer each member approaches, places a piece of frankincense on burning embers, and pours wine on the food. Here stands too a smoking pipe. All remain seated in silence, in order that the souls of the deceased ancestors may eat in peace.[2]

The Abkhasian, as has already been stated, have no Paschal greeting such as "Christ is risen". They welcome each other with a kiss, saying: "May God grant us that we meet again next year," to which the other replies: "And for a hundred years."

[1] Quoted from the Russian and Georgian translation of A. Lamberti's *Relatione della Colchide hoggi detta Mengrelia nella quale si tratta dell'Origine, costumi e Costumi naturali di quei Paesi.* Published in Naples, 1654.

[2] This rite will be described in detail in my work *The Cult of the Ancestors.*

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8. *Thursday of Easter Week*

(*dsatchòkhur, mardyàni t'argyalàz*)

796 On the Thursday of Easter week the Abkhasians offer a sacrifice [796] to *dsatchòkhur, mardyàni t'argyalàz*. I do not know what the first word denotes. *Mardyàni* is the Megrelian *mardiani* (Geo. *madliani*) and denotes "beneficent", "blessed", "abundant"; while *t'argyalàz* is derived from the Georgian word *mt'avar-angelozi*, archangel; it is not clear, however, which of the archangels is meant. According to the explanation of the Commission, this "icon" punishes the offending family by causing the death, in particular, of children. "If there are children in the family, it does not touch the adults," commented the Commission. Sacrifice to this "icon" is always offered by an oak tree. On the Thursday, early in the morning, sacrificial cakes are baked, and the whole family repair to their oak, which is usually situated nearby within the enclosure. Everybody kneels, [789] facing eastward, and the head of the family makes a bloodless offering consisting of *akwakwàr* and cakes, and entreats the great Dsatchkhur, the beneficent T'argialaz, to forgive them their trespasses, voluntary or involuntary. *Àämen* say the whole family. The oak tree is decorated [824] with pieces of many coloured stuffs, some fastened with nails and [778] some with wax. This oak is sacred and to fell, damage, or defile it is strictly forbidden.

On the same day, in the evening, but this time at home, the family [788] make a blood offering to *T'argyalàz*. A fattened capon is immolated and cakes are again baked. Some families keep pitchers with "sacrificial wine" in his honour.

"In ancient times when people were not so depraved, T'argialaz [787] procured for the day of offering a wild he-goat as his victim," Osman Kamkia informed me, "just as the Ilori 'icon' procured an ox. Now he no longer does so, for we are not worthy of his favours!" concluded the old man, sighing. The peasants Kamkia are *me-khat-ur-n-i* (Geo.), i.e. "attendants of the 'icon'." They keep a little cottage (*p'atskha*) [778] where the "god" is supposed to dwell invisibly. A money-box is kept in the cottage, into which the faithful drop copper coins used exclusively for the purchase of sacrificial offerings.

An old Megrelian, whose name has unfortunately become effaced in my note-book, told me the following:—

778 "The all-powerful and miraculous icon, Dsatchkhur, was removed 789 by the Svans from the Salkhino church, and taken to Svanet'i, where it remained for a long time; in the end, however, moved by pity for the Megrelians, the icon returned of its own accord and alighted on an oak which stands on the picturesque hill of Salkhino. Near this

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oak the Megrelians built a church in its honour, in which this icon rests to this day. It has not forgotten the Svans whom it often visits." My Megrelian informant is an inhabitant of Salkhino.

9. *Àhwsa-rèmshap'*

Abkhasians call the first Sunday after Easter Low Sunday, *Àhwsa-rèmshap'*, i.e. Pascha for women. This day is set apart for public games. Early in the morning everybody assembles in the public square where they indulge in all sorts of sport, chiefly, however, horse racing and tournaments. Next day the Abkhasians go back to work, and ordinary life is resumed.

The public games (on holidays) are continued till Whit Monday.

10. *Àdsyla-nɔ̀hwa*

In connection with *Àmshap'* mention may be made of two supplications, *Àdsyla-nɔ̀hwa* (cf. III (*d*)) and "*Supplication of the Leybaa*". I have not been lucky enough to have witnessed the latter ceremony, which, by the way, belongs to a cult of the Bzib Abkhasians.[1] The worship of the tree, so picturesquely described by ancient writers, such as Strabo, Procopius of Cæsarea, is preserved in a most conspicuous form with its sacred grove, in this supplication of the Leybaa *gvari*, as is also the name of the deity, in that of *Àdsyla-nɔ̀hwa*; *Àdsyla* denotes tree, *nɔ̀hwa* (*anɔ̀hwara*), praying, supplication. The deity of the tree itself is called *Àdsyla-intswakhwɔ̀*, wherein the latter part denotes "his (of the male rational being) part of god, deity". The Abkhasians in their religion personify and "intellectualize" all manifestations of life, and they strictly distinguish the gender of each of them.

In order to protect wanton children who roam about without restraint, and love to climb trees, the Abkhasians make offerings to the "spirit of the tree", entreating the "great part of the deity of the tree" to guard their children against falling off trees and hurting themselves. The objects offered are capon and cakes. The oak (*a-j*) they consider as the sacred tree, to which they make the offering; walnut-trees (particularly the hazel-nut-tree) and yoke-elms are "pure" trees. If someone falls from the tree they must dig up some coal from under the spot where the person fell; if no coal is found, the accident is regarded as serious; and the person will not survive the fall. An offering is also made to the "spirit of the tree" in the case of certain illnesses, as directed by sorceresses, the sick person being supposed to have fallen ill through having incurred the wrath of the spirit.

[1] About this see the article by N. Pateyna, in the *Collaborator of the Transcaucasian Mission* (in Russian), 1912, pp. 107–112, 124–7.

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Notes and Considerations concerning Chapter II

1796 It is of great interest to determine which pagan cult approximates, under the name of *Àmshap'*, to Easter, the day of the Resurrection of Christ. I. Javakhishvili states in his well-known *History of the Georgian Nation* (in Georgian) that, according to Dubrovin, the Abkhasians called *Àmshap'* also *Mizithhu*. In my opinion this is another form of the Abkhasian word *mɜzəkhwə̀*, i.e. " part of the moon," derived from *ámɜza*, moon, and *a-khwə̀*, dole, part, share. If this supposition is correct, *mɜzəkhwə̀* would denote " to give to the moon its share, part ", i.e. " praying to the moon." [1] It should be noted, however, that neither the members of the Commission nor anyone whom I questioned knew anything about this name of *Àmshap'*. It is to be assumed that this name was noted down from the lips of the Mountaineers among whom it had evidently been preserved. In further support of the possible close connection between *Àmshap'* [1796] and the moon cult (and the " tree spirit ") there is also the fact that the most important role in these festivals is assigned to St. George of Ilori, to which saint, as Javakhishvili has proved in his aforementioned work, is assimilated the moon cult. The procuring by this saint of a bullock, its " purification " by leading it three times from the mountains to the sea and back, the dedication to him of the cow *adzàtwə̀*, and, finally, the Gurian name of *zhwabràn*, *Iloroba*, prove that St. George is closely connected with the Abkhasian pleiade. Here is yet another curious fact. In the village of Bandza there is a church dedicated to St. George and called Shourkari. There still exists here the following custom: On the Monday [2] following Low Sunday, after the domestic offering, the populace repair to the church, and on their way, singing *Kyrie eleison*, they uproot a tree without the use of any implement, carry it three times around the wall enclosing the church, and offer it to St. George. The tree is then left within the church enclosure until the next year when it is replaced by a fresh one. This, in my opinion, symbolizes the victory of St. George over the moon (= *t'ut'a* in Megrelian, and over the " tree ").[3] Such a custom also [1911] prevails in the village Opshkvit'i, in Lower Imeret'i, where on the 23rd April the populace offers, in the same manner as at Bandza, a tree to St. George.[4]

1796 1911 Judging from the description of *The Supplication of the Leybaa*, by the priest N. Pateyna, which has been preserved in its purest state,

[113] [1] Cf. N. Y. Marr, *On the Religious Beliefs of the Abkhasians*, p. 133 (or its translation in this Journal, pp. 175–6.)

[2] " Monday " in Megrelian is *t'ut'ashkhi*, that is, the day of the moon (I. Kipshidze, op. cit., s.v. *dghe*). Noteworthy is Lamberti's description of the fear of the moon by the Megrelians.

[3] According to the information given me by Sh. P'aghava and El. Ot'khmezuri.

[4] *O-pshkvit'-i*, judging from its form, is of Megrelian origin.

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Wednesday was the day of the prayer to the tree spirit, with both the Abkhasians and the K'art'vels (and Megrels),[1] which is partly confirmed by the Megrelian name of this day, i.e. *jumashkha*; the latter consists of *juma* and *shkha* (Geo. *dghe*). What does the first component word denote? May it not be derived from the Abkhasian word *ajəma*, she-goat? The Pshavs have preserved the more salient *jumaghis jvari*, wherein *jumaghi* = *ajəmagh* denoting "goat-seed, goat-male", he-goat. This term may have been obtained from the custom of the Abkhasians of dedicating, or offering, exclusively, a goat to the tree spirit. This supposition finds further confirmation in the legend of Dsatchkhur, which procured exclusively for its festivals the wild goat (male).

One may also note the concordance between the names of some days in the Megrelian language, and the fact that it is just on these days that the cult is observed of those gods to whom these days are dedicated. Thus on the Monday (*t'ut'ashkha*) the Abkhasians offer a sacrifice to the moon; on the Wednesday (*jumashkha*) they observe the cult of the tree, and on the Tuesday (*t'akhashkha*) the cult of the mother-earth.[2]

III. Nʌn-ẖwa

The Abkhasians call the day of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin (15th August) (*a*) *Nʌn-ẖwa*.[3] They observe with great reverence both *Nʌn-ẖwa* and the Lent of the Assumption. With *Nʌn-ẖwa* are connected the following superstitions of the Abkhasians:—

(*a*) *Ẇyəst'ʌ̆-lʌ̀khəra* (Meg. *Dchindchat'oba*)

Abkhasians associate the night before the 1st August with increased activity on the part of evil spirits *ẇyəst'ʌ̆*, demons; and

[1] N. Janashia evidently here uses *k'art'vel* as a generic term, including Megrels, but etymologically and linguistically such use of the term is definitely inadmissible. (Ed. *Khrist. Vost.*)

[2] The last two comparisons are made by the author, because for *jumashkha* he had also another etymology in connection with the Abkhasian *a-j*, oak, with which he identifies the Megrelian *ja*, tree; while in the first part (*t'akha-*) of the word *t'akhashkha*, he saw the Megrelian *dikha*, earth, soil. These doubtful etymologies have been eliminated. On the other hand, cf. *nertchi*, in I. Kipshidze's *Grammar of the Megrelian Language*, s.v., where this term is interpreted as "the basis of something, or the ground on which a house stands", and since the prayer dedicated to *nertchi*, or "master, lord" *nertchi*, as to a kind of deity, cannot be performed in a house with a wooden floor, I. Kipshidze concluded "that *nertchi* is god of the earth", in which supposition he was to a certain extent supported by definitions of the same word, given by lexicographers (S. S. Orbeliani: "the external side of the bottom"; Tchubinov (I): "bottom, the lower part of a vessel"; Tchub (II): "the lower part of the vessel, of the pitcher"). These materials N. Janashia supplements in his letter, dated 16th April, thus: "In Imeret'i *nertchi* denotes ceiling (see also V. Beridze, *Silqvishona*, The Dictionary, s.v.), while in Megrelia, on the other hand, the rite is known under the name of *p'udzeshi do nertchish khvoma*, 'the praying of the foundation and ceiling' if not 'of the floor'." (Ed. *Khrist. Vost.*)

[3] In my opinion *Nan(an)* denotes mother, and *ẖwa*, "says" (from *shwara*, see above, p. 134, note 2), that is, "for the mother," "the mother's day."

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they, therefore, take precautionary measures to avoid becoming victims of the malignant will of the evil spirits. Nothing is left outside the house, or in the courtyard; nobody sleeps out of doors. To safeguard themselves from evil spirits, the superstitious attach pieces of wax to their hair. Crosses are made from *a-lakwə̀mha* (Geo. *lekumkha*),[1] to which are appended acanthus leaves, and these are placed at the courtyard gates, house doors, the gates of the kitchen gardens and cornfields, the poultry and cow-houses, etc. Acanthus leaves are hung around the necks of the domestic animals. The Abkhaz is convinced that *dwyəst'aă* dare not approach these crosses, which are also a protection against evil eyes.

During this night the evil spirits go out to look for booty, under the leadership of their mother, *Arapàp* (Meg. *rokapi*). On this expedition they are joined by human beings in whom evil spirits have taken their abode. Some of these evil spirits ride wolves or cats, and devour all the animals left outside by their owners who had no time, or had forgotten to drive them into shelter.[2] All evil spirits without exception stir abroad during this night; they wander growling from village to village and through the forests. For this reason it is easy to find out and catch them, and with this object youths go into the woods, where they make a large fire, using the wood of *a-lakwə̀mha*. The youngsters hide behind the bushes and watch out to see if they can recognize those of their neighbours into whom an evil spirit has entered. It is believed that the demons never pass a bonfire without stopping and warming themselves a little by it. Often quarrels arise on this ground, with unpleasant consequences. This custom of seeking after the evil spirits, "demons," is called *Awyəst'aă lə̀khəra*, which denotes "the catching of the demon"; it is also known under the Megrelian name of *dchindchat'oba*. To this day an Abkhaz believes that an evil spirit can enter into, and remain in, a human body, particularly in that of an old woman.

The chief *dwyəst'aă* is the eldest son of the sister of God, and that is why He, being a blood relation, cannot destroy him, although he may frighten him off with thunder. Here it will be appropriate to quote the following popular story:—

"At the time of the partition of the work between God and the devil, the former, exercising the right of seniority,[3] suggested to the devil that they should divide the world between them. The latter

[1] The Russian *krushina*, according to the botanists of the Sukhum Botanical Garden, that is, *alaternus* (R. Eristov mentions the plant *lshukha*, but he does not explain it. Ed. *Khrist. Vost.*).

[2] To safeguard an animal from wild beasts when he strays in the forest, they "bind the mouth" of the wild animals as follows: a pair of scissors is tied and a suitable prayer is uttered. "A sure remedy."

[3] The younger divides, and the elder chooses.

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agreed. During the night God caused the earth to be covered with luxuriant vegetation. Captivated by the beauty of vegetation the devil suggested to God that the best way to divide the world between them would be for one to have the earth and the other the vegetation. God took as his share the earth, and the devil received the vegetation. God then ordered him to remove his vegetation immediately. Only now did the devil realize his mistake, which, however, he rectified thus: he restored the vegetation to God, and in return for it he begged and obtained from Him the right to the souls of those who fall from the trees, having climbed them without first praying to God for their safety. . . ."

(*b*) *Barbanjia* (*dchiakokona*)

Before sunset on the 14th August the Abkhasian youths light, in their respective courtyards, a fire of flax straw (at present, owing to the lack of this straw, they use dry fern, etc.). Each person leaps thrice through the flame of this fire, shouting " I have burnt the evil spirit; I have burnt the evil spirit ". By so leaping through the flame an Abkhaz " purifies " himself of the evil spirit. After they have leapt three times through the flame each throws a piece of salt into the burning fire, and then, altogether, they begin to beat the fire with sticks to extinguish it, at the same time shouting the above quoted words. At the conclusion of the whole operation, the neighbours inform each other of their victory over the evil spirit by firing a gun. This manner of destroying the evil spirits is called " the burning of the demon " or *Barbanjia*. The denotation of the word is incomprehensible to me.[1]

(*c*) *Nân-ĥwa*

On the day of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin, the " pure " (eldest) woman in the family prepares *a-tcha* (" a round bread stuffed with cheese "), boils a cock, and leads the whole family into the kitchen garden. Here they all kneel in front of the blossoming cucumber vine, and the eldest woman makes offering to Nan, saying: " the great Nan (*Nân-du*)! We who offer thee this sacrifice, established by our ancestors, humbly entreat thee to have mercy upon our house: increase it like the stars in the sky! " etc. The kneeling family repeat with her, *Âmen*. But no one knows who *Nan* (*Anan*) is; they only know that she is a goddess of procreation of the human race. Of the Mother of God there is no knowledge whatever.

[1] The Georgian equivalent is *Dchiakokona*, which is observed on Ash-Wednesday. *Dchiakokona*, according to Tchubinov, denotes " the leaping through the fire on Wednesday of Passion-week ".

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796 [619] On this day also they "lay the table", that is, prepare a dinner, for the souls of the deceased, unless the day happens to be one of abstinence, i.e. Wednesday or Friday. In the latter event the feast takes place on the following day.

(e) *Àdsyla-nə̀hwa*

On the same day of the Assumption is observed *Àdsyla-nə̀hwa* (cf. II (10)). The children are taken to a meadow where they are told to place their right legs against a tree. Each holding an *akwakwàr* in the right hand, they remain meekly in this position until the eldest in the family has addressed the prayer to "the spirit of the tree", entreating "the great part of the deity of the tree" to safeguard them from giddiness, from falling off the tree, and from injuries. The children must eat their *akwakwàr* without removing their legs from the tree.

(f) *Anàna-gùnda* (the goddess of bees)

796 231 This is both a spring and a summer feast.

In the spring, when the bees begin to hive, the eldest ("pure") woman of the family takes some hirse (Geo. *p'etvi*) and an egg, and [796] enters the apiary, where she passes the offerings three times over the hives, and prays to the goddess of the bees, *Anàna-gùnda*: "Submitting these as a pledge that the established offering will be made at the proper time, I humbly entreat thee, *Anàna-gùnda*, to be the guardian of our bees; safeguard them from all illnesses, multiply them, and grant them a good crop!" Hirse and the egg are hung over the apiary.

In the summer, between the 15th July and the end of August, before the gathering of the first honeycombs, more during August, on a Thursday or Saturday, the promised offering to the goddess [780] *Anàna-gùnda* is made. A large corncake (*a-mgal*), stuffed with cheese, is baked, and placed on one of the hives; also an egg. The family kneel in front of the offering, and the "pure" woman again invokes the mercy of *Anàna-gùnda* upon the honey bees, and says an improvised prayer. The family repeat a long drawn out *ǎämen*.

After the ceremony, she divides the corncakes crosswise, into four parts, with two strokes of the knife; and cuts these into smaller pieces. The family sit down there and then and dine. They do not [621] forget the neighbours, sending a small piece each. The remains are placed in a basket and hung up in the apiary. Everybody passing by is obliged to enter the apiary and bless the honey bees and, scattering about a little hirse, eat a piece of corncake.

[178] In ancient times when the Abkhasians irreproachably observed all the rites, the gods were more merciful to them. Thus, the goddess

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of the bees as a sign of her good disposition towards a given family placed an egg (the egg of *Anàna-gùnda*) in one of the hives. No matter how much honey they took from that hive, there would always be a plentiful supply of it.[1]

IV. K'IRSA

Christmas is one of the four chief holidays[2] of the year. Abkhasians call it *K'irsa* (Megr. *K'irse*), which denotes Christ. An Abkhaz considers it a great disgrace if he fails on this day to kill a goat or some other animal. On this day "the table is laid" also for the souls of ancestors.

(a) *Agwə-nə̀hwa*

For some families it is obligatory to make an offering early in the morning on this day to *Agwə-nə̀hwa*, for which *akwakwə̀r* are baked. The supplicant entreats that *Agwə-nə̀hwa* grant them the warmth of his eyes and his heart. In translation the word denotes, "praying to heart." This "praying" is also known to the Gurians, under the name of "praying for the womb" (Geo. *Mutslis salotsavi*); Megrelians call it *Khatsitsi*.[3] According to I. Kipshidze, it is the New Year's Day breakfast.[4] In my opinion it is nothing more than a survival of the supplication described below.

(b) *Got'anùa* (*sharp'ə̀-nə̀hwa*)

Some *gvari*-s have preserved to this day the following custom. On Christmas Eve, the family go to bed very early; they rise, however, at midnight, and begin praying. Enough chickens are killed to provide one for every member of the family (blackbirds also may be used), or in their place a young goat; *akwakwə̀r* baked. All this is offered to *Got'anùa*; the food is consumed immediately after the prayer is ended, and the remains, if any, are not left but burnt without fail. All return to bed. The dawn must find them asleep. In Megrelian *got'ənua* denotes morning-twilight, dawn, to grow light, to dawn, the Abkhasian equivalent of which is *sharp'-nə̀hwa*, the morning prayer; the Megrelian term, however, is more in use.

I quote here the following story: "A female slave of a family,

[1] *Anàna*, in my opinion, is derived from *an*, mother; *gùnda*, probably from *gundi*, a swarm, a collection of something.

[2] Namely, the New Year, Easter, the Assumption, and Christmas.

[3] *Khatsitsi—khatsetsi* is called also a bride. (Cf. I. Kipshidze, *Gram. of the Megrelian Languages*, s.v. *khat'etsi*.) (Ed. *Khrist. Vostok*.)

[4] *Grammar of the Megrelian Language*, s.v. (where is also a reference to the explanation of the same word in Georgian by V. Beridze, *Sitqvishona*, s.v., Ed. *Kh. V.*).

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I quote here the following story: "A female slave of a family, being angry with her masters, took a portion of the dough for *akwakwar* destined for the " god " *Got'anùa*, and placing it in a scoop of bitter-gourd (*akwapey*, Geo. *kope*), hid it in the loft. As usual the family went to bed after the ceremony. But unfortunately for them the offended *Got'anùa* soundly thrashed all of them, using for the purpose the very same scoop in which had been hidden the dough destined for himself. This *gvari* makes propitiatory offerings at the will of sorcerers to *Got'anùa* twice a year, during the night before Christmas and before the Assumption.

Got'anùa, under the name of *Okhvàmuri*, evidently spread throughout Megrelia during the missionaryship of Lamberti.[1]

V. Deities whose Cults have no Fixed Dates

1. *Et-nòkha—Àga-nòkha*

The sea, like other manifestations of nature, has its own " part of deity ", called *Àga-inkhwò* or *àga-intswakhwò*. An Abkhaz makes an offering to this deity when he goes to the sea coast for any considerable time. The sea deity is not to be trifled with ; if it is slighted it becomes turbulent, it surges, and punishes the unrespectful. Therefore even the children are forbidden to throw pebbles, or to spit into the sea. The worship of this deity has been preserved in its purest form among the Bzib Abkhasians, namely among the peasantry of the Gudout (Gudaut) district, of the *gvari* of Amp'arùa. It has been described by A. Tch(ukbar), in *Sotrudnik Zakavkazskoy Missii* (" The Collabarator of the Transcaucasian Mission "), 1912, p. 373 sqq., where the deity *Et-nòkh-Àga-nòkha* is called *Et-nykh Ag-Nykh*. *Àga* denotes sea, *(a)nòkh*—" icon." But what does the word *Et* denote ?[2]

2. *Àshkha-intswakhwò* (god of mountains)

Mountains also have " their part of God " known under the name of *Àshkha-intswakhwò*. *Àshkha* denotes mountain ; *intswakhwò*, " his (of the male rational being) part of God." I have pointed out above that the Abkhaz often uses the word *nòkha* in the sense of god, which in the Christian faith is understood, or more correctly, translated, as icon. The god of mountains " governs " all the mountains and the beasts inhabiting them. Abkhaz shepherds make offerings to this god twice a year, in the spring when they drive the cattle to the mountains, and in the autumn when they drive them back. To him are subject also mountain game. In order to preserve the game from

[1] A. Lamberti, op. cit., pp. 148-9.

[2] This word manifests a consonance with the Assyro-Babylonian name of the god of the sea, *Ea*. Is this a mere coincidence ?

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6. *Akhyə Zoshən*

The Abkhasians ascribe diseases generally to supernatural influences or gods, but some diseases have their own special gods. The god of small-pox, for example, is *Akhyə Zoshən* (the golden Zoskhan), and also his consort, the goddess *Khania Shkwdkwa* (Khania the white). How important are the gods of the Abkhasians may be judged from the following circumstance which took place during the spring of 1914 in one of the settlements of the village Jgerdi. Throughout the winter and spring of the year Abkhasia was in the grip of a severe epidemic of small-pox. In order to check the spread of the disease vaccinators were sent to the affected areas. The following account of what happened was described to me by P. Janashia, one of the vaccinators. A certain settlement, fearing that the gods might wreak vengeance upon them, refused to admit the vaccinators; they preferred to safeguard themselves against this terrible disease, *atswarp'shdzd* (small-pox), by the adoption of the gods. *Atswd* denotes skin, rind, and *ap'shdzd*, pretty, beautiful; the whole, in translation, denoting " that which decorates (beautifies) the skin ".

By pooling their resources, the settlement raised enough money to buy a couple of snow-white goats and a sufficiency of provisions, and made an expedition into the forest. Here, amidst the quietude and peace of over-hanging leaves, a sumptuous feast was prepared for the divine guests. When everything was ready, and the victim had been placed, according to custom, on *ashwamkyadt'*, the head of the settlement said the prayer and made the offering to the gods. Nearby stood two bedsteads, adorned with silk bedclothes, on which sat two young women, an *amauri* and a peasant woman; their naked breasts were covered with silk handkerchiefs. The whole assembly knelt down, while the head of the settlement implored the gods to accept their offering by kissing the breasts of the most beautiful women of the settlement, and thus become, in accordance with the ancestral custom, adopted sons of the settlement. Near the " foster-mothers of gods " stood two of the finest horses, one with a side saddle. The sumptuous feast followed the ceremony of adoption, and afterwards the people, holding the horses by the bridle, on which were to be riding the newly adopted gods, *Akhyə Zoshən* and *Khania Shkwdkwa*, escorted the precious guests to the accompaniment of song, far away from the settlement. Thus they " turned away ", or warded off, the small-pox.

" You may not believe it," an Abkhaz from the settlement told me, " but this ' adoption ' saved us from the small-pox; not one of us fell a victim to it. You, the learned, have caused our ruin by bringing down upon us the anger of the gods of our fathers," he concluded, with a deep sigh.